PITTS DESCRIBES DAHMER ATTACK

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All Charged Mentioned in Testimony

By JAMES H. DOWNEY

MERIDIAN, Miss. (AP)—Star witness Billy Roy Pitts told a federal court jury Wednesday Ku Klux Klansmen carried out a carefully planned firebomb attack which killed Negro leader Vernon F. Dahmer Sr.

Pitts, the key government witness since pleading guilty to state and federal charges in the case, testified before a jury trying 11 men on federal charges of conspiracy in the Dahmer death.

He attended two meetings at which the Dahmer affair was discussed, Pitts testified. At the first, he said, Klan leaders asked for volunteers for projects that were already behind schedule.

Under cross examination, Pitts denied any deal with the federal government in order to testify. He told the court that from November of 1967 until April, 1969 he received just under $7,000 from the government.

He said the money was used to take care of his family and to keep them out of Mississippi. Defense attorneys earlier charged that Pitts was "bought and paid for" by the government.

Wednesday's session lasted until the early hours of the night before federal court Judge Dan Russell ended testimony until Thursday.

He said Sam H. Bowers, identified as imperial wizard of the White Knights of the Klan at that time, called especially for hand-picked men for the Dahmer job, and asked for a home-burning and if possible death.

MEET IN CORNFIELD

The second meeting, he said, was a week before the Jan. 10, 1966, slaying and was held in a cornfield east of Laurel. He said Klan leaders asked for volunteers for behind-schedule projects.

The day before the attack on the Dahmer home and store near Hattiesburg, he said, preparations were wade.

During his testimony, he mentioned all 11 of the men on trial

They were Bowers, 44; Cecil Victor Sessum, 33; Henry Edward DeBoxtel, 32; Lawrence Byrd Sr., 47; Howard Travis Giles, 40; Frank Lyons, 36; Deavors Nix, 45; Charles Richard Noble, 26; William Thomas Smith, 33; Lester Thornton, 44; and Charles Clifford Wilson, 36. All are from the Laurel area.

Pitts said Nix was a Klan investigator, Sessum head of Klavern No. 40 as exalted cyclops, and Byrd was a Klan senator.

He said all the defendants except Wilson, Smith and Giles were present at the first of the two planning sessions, and all but Giles, Wilson, Bowers and Smith were present at the second.

PREPARATIONS MADE

During the preparations on the day before the attack, he said, Sessum came by for him and they went to the cafe in Laurel operated by Nix. He said he saw Bowers there and they later went to the home of Sessum's father.

While there, he said, cars with Wilson, Smith, Noble, Thornton, Lyons and Deboxtel came up.

"They came in the house and brought shotguns and pistols with them," Pitts said. "Wilson got plastic jugs from his automobile and Sessums brought some from the house. They filled them with gasoline at Sessum's service station next door."

They left in cars belonging to Wilson and Giles, he said, and took mostly back roads to Dahmer's place.

"Cecil Sessum told Henry Deboxtel to take the men riding with him and burn the store," Pitts testified. "He told Charles Clifford Wilson to take care of the car and truck in the carport.

"He instructed Smith to shoot out the picture window in front of the house. He instructed me to guard him (Sessum) while he threw a jug through the picture window."

'LOST PISTOL'

Pitts testified that he lost his pistol there from his quick-draw holster.

"Wilson took two jugs to the carport," he testified. "Smith shot out the window."

He said Sessum tossed the jugs through the shattered picture window, then ignited the gasoline with a burning rag on the end of a forked stick."

As the group fled, he said, the Deboxtel-driven Giles car turned its lights on against orders and some of the men in the car with Pitts opened fire on the other until its identity was established.

The Deboxtel car also suffered a flat and the men decided to abandon it.

'SEEMED UPSET'

Later, he said, he saw Bowers with Nix and Sessum and "Bowers seemed awfully upset because I lost my gun and we left the car."

Sessum was quoted as telling Deboxtel to get word to Giles at his work to report the car had been stolen. Pitts said Wilson was instructed to bury all the weapons in another county until the situation cooled.

During the day, Judge Dan Russell authorized a change in the jury.

N. G. Cumbest of Hattiesburg was excused because his wife was undergoing emergency surgery.

He was replaced by Mrs. E. R. Trussell of Hattiesburg, who was one of two alternate jurors. The change left the jury at six men and six women.